4.6 F. Foregate Street

Character Area Assessment

Location

This character area sits adjacent to the eastern section of the City Walls and includes the Clock and Eastgate. It stretches for approximately 500 metres along Foregate Street, taking in Grosvenor Street roundabout at its eastern extremity. To the north, the area extends towards the canal, encompassing the Tesco store on Queen Street and the Georgian townhouses of Queen's Place. Union Street and Vicars Lane loosely define the area's southern boundary.

Sub-Areas

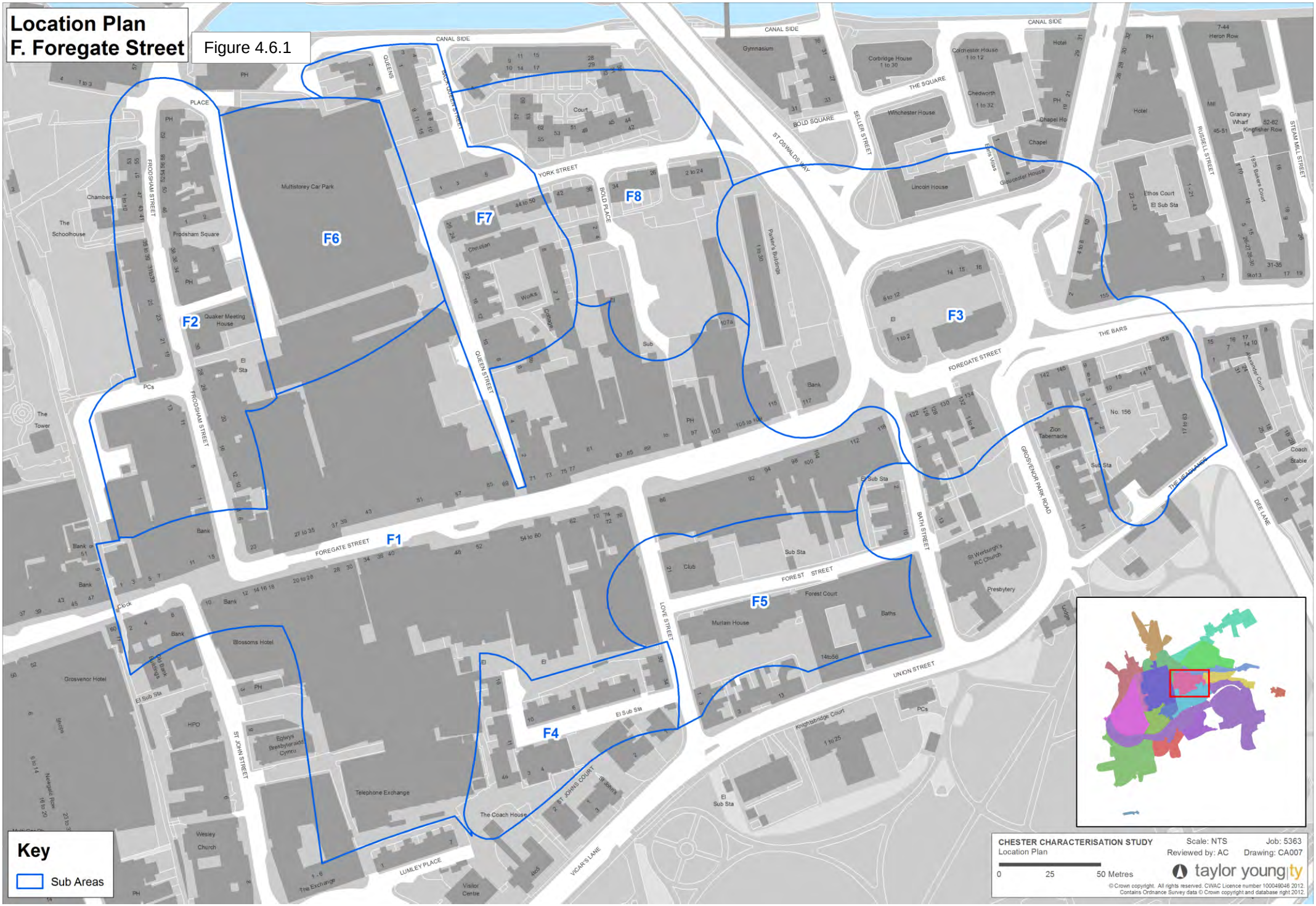
This character area has been divided into the following sub-areas:

- **F1. Foregate Street –**a primary shopping street stretching eastwards from the City Walls.
- **F2. Frodsham Street –** running perpendicular to Foregate Street, leading towards the canal and performing a secondary retail function.
- **F3. The Barrs –** at the eastern end of Foregate Street, including Grosvenor Court and buildings around the edges of the roundabout.
- **F4. Priory Place –** a quiet enclave of brick built cottages dating from 1898.
- **F5. Forest Street** – including the impressive Grade II listed Murlain House (formerly St Werburghs Middle School), and Chester Public Swimming Baths.
- **F6. Queen Street Multi-storey car park** – comprising the Tesco store and multi-storey car park.
- **F7. Queen Street –** including Queen's Place. Predominantly Victorian and Georgian housing.
- **F8. York Street –** a residential street of modern housing Queen Street

Foregate Street

Location Plan
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.1



Historical Development

In the Roman era, the civil settlement outside of the walled fortress was on the eastern side of the City and the spine of this development was an early form of Foregate Street. In medieval times Foregate Street existed, as it does today, as the principal road leading directly eastwards from the Eastgate out of the City. This can clearly be seen in Braun's 1581 map of Chester. Frodsham Street was originally the commencement of a Roman Road which ran from the fortress, along the line of modern Brook Street, through the suburb of Hoole and on to Frodsham and beyond. Much of this Roman route remains in use to this day although some sections are now little more than footpaths. The Barrs (at the eastern end of Foregate Street) was once the location of a outer defensive fortification for the City.

The Barrs as they would have appeared in the 1770s

A focus of activity in this area in the Middle Ages was the Jousting Croft. Located to the north of Foregate Street, presumably centred on the Kaleyards site - formerly the Roman parade ground, this space has a long continuous history of being undeveloped. It was here that jousts, tournaments and archery practice took place. All around the perimeter were erected the stalls, booths and amusements of the fairs and markets. Military exercises ceased to be performed around the close of the 16th century. The canal now flows through the old Jousting Croft and part of Queen Street covers the south of it today.

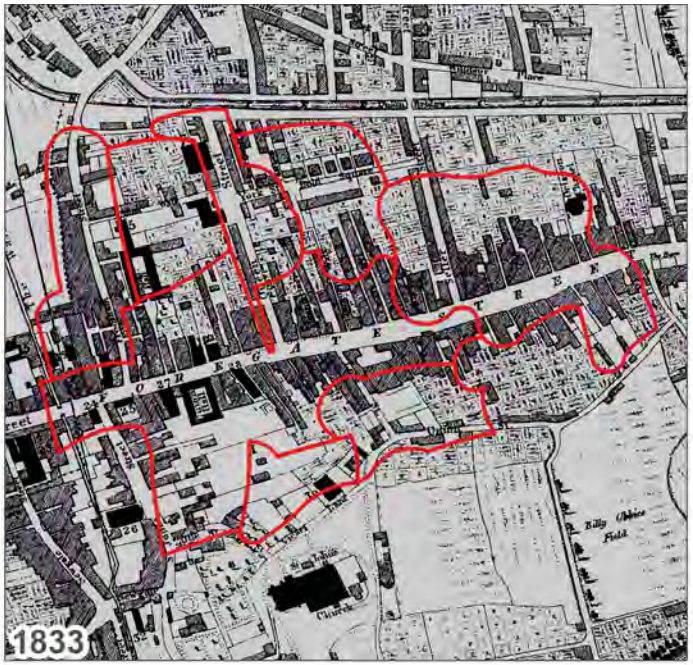
During the 18th Century when the City Walls were converted into walkways, the medieval gateways were replaced by wider arched gateways that allowed traffic to enter the City more easily. Eastgate was the first gateway to be replaced in 1768. It was built at the expense of Richard Grosvenor, 1st Earl Grosvenor, and designed by Mark Hayden, the Earl's surveyor of buildings. Eastgate Clock was added to the top of gateway in 1899 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee two years earlier. The clock was designed by the eminent Chester architect, John Douglas.

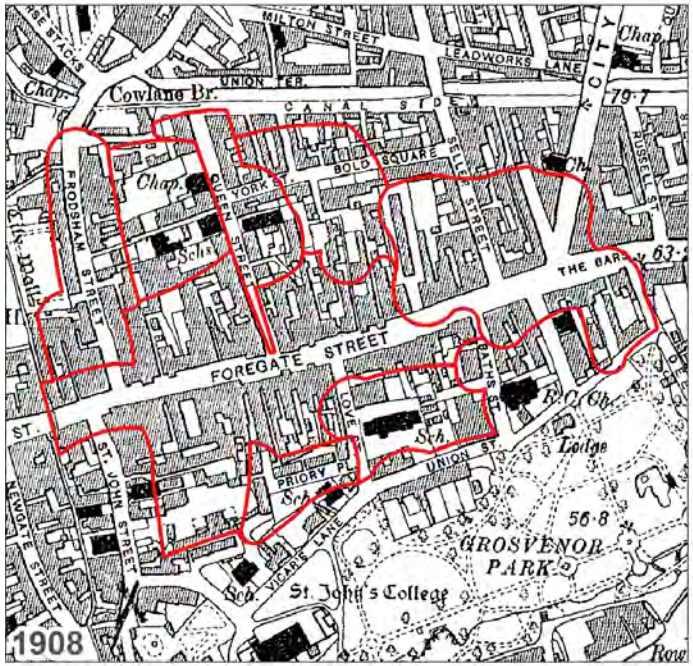
In Georgian and Victorian times, the area around Grosvenor Park was a popular location for the wealthy gentry to build homes (as was Lower Bridge Street) and it included the homes of several notable families. Forest House, on the corner of Love Street and Forest Street, remains as the last vestige of this period.

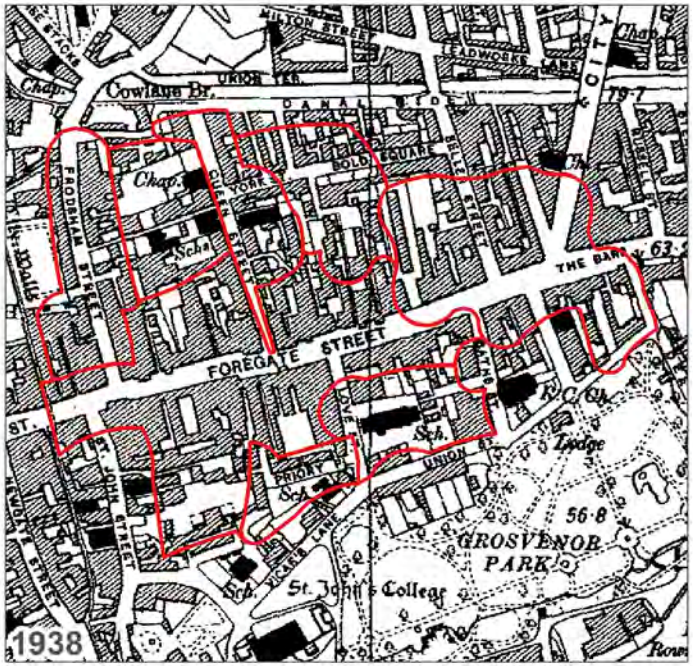
The historical maps reveal the evolution of the existing street pattern over time. The most significant change has been the construction of the inner ring road and Grosvenor Street roundabout, severing the direct link between Seller Street and Foregate Street and reducing east-west connectivity between York Street and Bold Square. Queen Street extended through to the canal until it was recently severed by the Tesco development. Forest Street appears only after 1938, the grounds of the former school having previously included land to the north, preventing connection between Love Street and Bath Street. The link between Queen Street and Frodsham Street is shown to have only ever existed as a footpath.

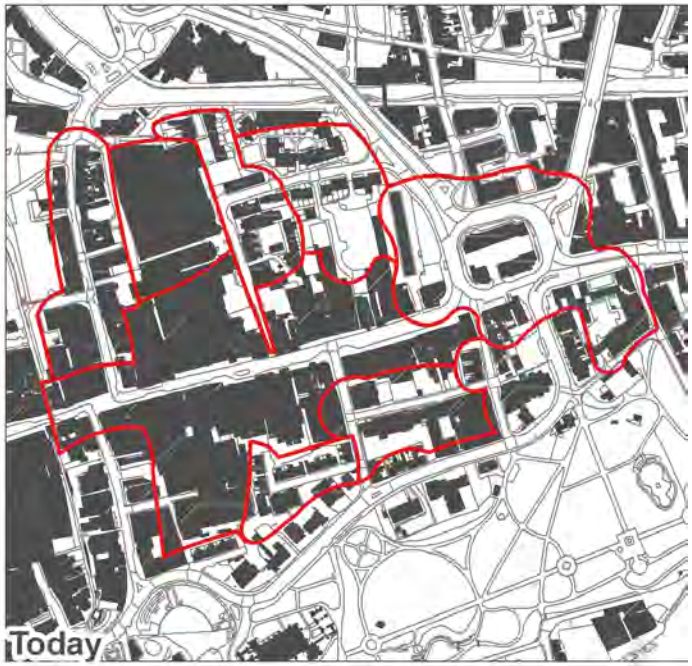
Historical Development
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.2









In summary, this area has a long history of continuous development. The character and urban form of Foregate Street and Frodsham Street has remained relatively consistent, both streets retaining their linear form and being strongly contained by development on either side.

View from Eastgate (1944)

Land-uses

This character area supports a broad mix of land-uses. Foregate Street performs a predominantly retail function. Most of Chester's national multiples are located here including Marks and Spencer, Boots the Chemist, Clarks and WH Smith. Frodsham Street, in contrast, contains mostly secondary retail uses, including several charity shops and discount stores. Residential development is the principal land-use within sub-areas F7 (Queen's Street/Queen's Place), F4 (Priory Place) and F8 (York Street).

Grosvenor Court, in sub-area F3, provides modern office accommodation designed around a central courtyard. Additional office space is provided within several of the adjacent listed buildings including the former police headquarters on the corner of Grosvenor Park Road and the Barrs.

Sub-area F5 (Forest Street) supports a mix of offices (Murlain House) and leisure (a nightclub and public swimming baths).

Urban Form

The urban grain, as defined by the pattern of streets, blocks, and plots, is generally fine, with small development footprints, narrow plots (the remnants Burgage plots) and good connectivity. This historic grain has been partly eroded along sections of Foregate Street by infill development of larger units with wide frontages sitting alongside smaller plots. The effect of this juxtaposition is to create a street scene lacking in strong consistency. Where two wide frontages occur in close proximity to each other variety in the street scene is lost. In other instances however, larger stores have integrated more successfully with the historic fabric, as is the case with two Marks and Spencer's stores.

Foregate Street – buildings provide strong sense of enclosure

Foregate Street forms the principal east-west route through the area, with buildings set to back-of-pavement, forming a continuous frontage broken only by secondary side streets set at right angles to the main thoroughfare. At the pedestrianised Eastgate end, buildings are set around 15 metres apart (face to face), providing a strong sense of enclosure. The jettied effect of upper floors on several buildings enhances this sense of containment. Further east, the street widens to around 20 metres at its widest point. Colonnades are a strong feature along the length of Foregate Street, with projecting upper floors providing variation in the building line.

Foregate Street is predominantly straight but with numerous variations in the building line, providing long sightlines in both directions. The predominant building height is three storeys.

The Tesco store on Queen Street

Queen Street used to extend northwards through to the canal but was severed by the Tesco development. The store's rear servicing yard terminates the vista north, with no suggestion of the canal's presence beyond. Queen's Place, north of the store, is the disconnected northern end of Queen's Street. East-west linkages are also poor, with access to Frodsham Street being via the BHS store which leads through to Frodsham Shopping Mall. Queen Street lacks a coherent urban form, especially along its western side, a large portion of which is taken up by the rear servicing yard of the Boots store which is set behind a high brick wall. Development along this side of the street relates poorly to the scale of properties on the opposite side which has a stronger form, with properties (including a pleasant row of terraces), forming a more continuous frontage along the back of pavement. Footfall is noticeably less than on Foregate Street, reflecting its semi-residential character.

The historic street pattern breaks down at the eastern end of Foregate Street where it meets the inner ring road. The urban form becomes much looser and pedestrian linkages are poor (via underground subway). Development on the Barrs roundabout provides some cohesion to the built form in this area, softening the impact of the roads, and continuing the frontage of the Parker's buildings, the design of which is emulated by the corner buildings.

Levels are generally consistent across the area although there are slight falls south of Foregate Street along Love Street. At York Street, the ring road rises over the canal and its impact, both visually and in terms of noise, on the surrounding residential area is noticeable. The housing here is predominantly two stories in height, set behind low boundary walls with some low hedges and street trees adding interest to the public realm. The development relates well to the canal, providing active frontage overlooking the water. Unfortunately, the canal also provides views of the ramped entrance to the Tesco car park and bland brick wall. The view west is punctuated by the retained Georgian facade of the former Congregational Church.

Frodsham Street has retained much of its historic form. Buildings contain the street well, forming a predominantly continuous frontage. Incident is provided by a number of gable fronts which articulate the skyline. Buildings are a lesser scale than on Foregate Street, being predominantly two stories. The street bends slightly at its northern end as it approaches the canal, drawing the eye and creating a sense of intrigue at what lies around the corner. The tower of the Iceland development is only partially successful in its attempt to provide a fitting termination to the vista. The former district bank, together with the adjoining modern development (numbers 1-11), present an attractive frontage onto Frodsham Street which is let down by frontages on the opposite side of the street. Levels of footfall are high considering its secondary retail function. There are two access points along the western side of Frodsham Street that provide glimpsed views to the City walls and Cathedral (including the Kaleyards). East of Frodsham Street, the urban form takes on a different character with large building footprints (e.g. Tesco) and a fragmented street pattern.

Frodsham Street

The former cinema (now Brannigans) has an oppressive presence along Love Street, somewhat overshadowing the public realm. Its blank side elevation provides a negative view looking west from Forest Street. Nevertheless, it is rare example of an original cinema in Chester, with a strong Art Deco style and curving corner. The building relates well to Foregate Street in terms of its height and horizontal detailing. Further south, the built form is more human in scale, the cottages along Priory Place appearing dwarfed by the surrounding development.

Foregate Street (former cinema on left)

Urban Form
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.3

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Townscape Character

The area displays a very diverse townscape character. There is a large proportion of historic buildings but equally, the area has seen much modern intervention in the built form. The character of the area is therefore defined more by its variety than by a single predominating architectural style or age, although there are variations within the sub-areas.

Foregate Street contains a rich and interesting mix of traditional Victorian and Georgian architecture, interspersed with modern insertions and a number of early 20th Century 'black and white' buildings. Arcades are a common feature, providing a richness of experience at street level and providing natural shelter from the elements. However, the loss of natural light can create a rather dark and uninviting environment, particularly where long sections of the street are under cover. Brick, stone and timber facing are the principal materials for walling. Gable fronts are common, although there is no overall consistency in the roofscape, with traditional pitched and flat roofs also in evidence. Shopfronts are variable in quality, with many good examples but also (especially at the western end) a number of over-sized and poorly designed shopfronts.

Turning the corner into Frodsham Street, there is a discernable change in character. The pavement narrows, the quality of buildings and shop fronts is lower, and there is a greater concentration of lower-end retail uses, including a number of fast food takeaways and charity shops. For walling, the use of brick and white render predominates. Gable fronts have a visual prominence along the street, although traditional pitched roofs are also common.

Sub-area F8 (York Street) has a wholly contemporary townscape character. Housing here dates from the early 1980s. It is traditional in its appearance, with red brick and pitched slate roofs being the principal building materials.

Queen's Place (formerly part of Queen Street, now separated by the rebuilt faced of the chapel), in sub-area F7, is Georgian in character, with some attractive two and three storey townhouses finished with Flemish-bonded brown brickwork. The rear of properties backing onto Back Queen Street have a white rendered finish, providing a pleasant contrast to the red brick mass of the Bingo hall which occupies a prominent position on the north bank of the canal.

The cottages at Priory Place (*see left*) date from 1898 and were built by the philanthropic Chester Cottage Improvement Company which sought to provide model dwellings for working people. The cottages are built from stone-dressed brown brick and are very well detailed with blue diapering, hipped grey slate roofs and stone mullion windows. The consistency and completeness of these terraces, in this quiet enclave, creates a very strong townscape character.

The Grosvenor Court development at the Barrs roundabout (F3) has a strong neo-Georgian character. It is flanked by buildings inspired in part by the neo-gothic style of John Parker. On the opposite sides of the roundabout are a number of fine buildings: Lockwood's bank and shops (including The Cheshire Hangman) to the east; and Douglas' former police station and former Lombard bank to the south. Collectively these ensure that the Barrs is a strong gateway to the City core from the east.

F. Foregate Street: Typical Materials and Detail

Landscape Character

This character area is densely developed and contains very little in the way of green infrastructure with no formal areas of public open space. The quality of the public realm is moderate overall.

Along the main streets of Foregate Street, Frodsham Street and Queen Street, surfaces are uniformly hard-surfaced, with few areas of tree or shrub planting. There are a small number of individual trees spaced along the south side of Foregate Street but their overall impact is limited. Around York Street and Back Queen Street, there are some attractive landscaped areas which help to soften the otherwise urban character.

The footway is paved along Foregate Street, the width of the pavement is generous, and there are some attractive cast iron lighting columns. Hanging shop signs along both Foregate Street and Frodsham Street add to their character. Heavy traffic has a negative impact on the shopping environment along Foregate Street. Eastgate and the Clock are an important focal point and meeting place and the section of Foregate Street in this area is pedestrianised.

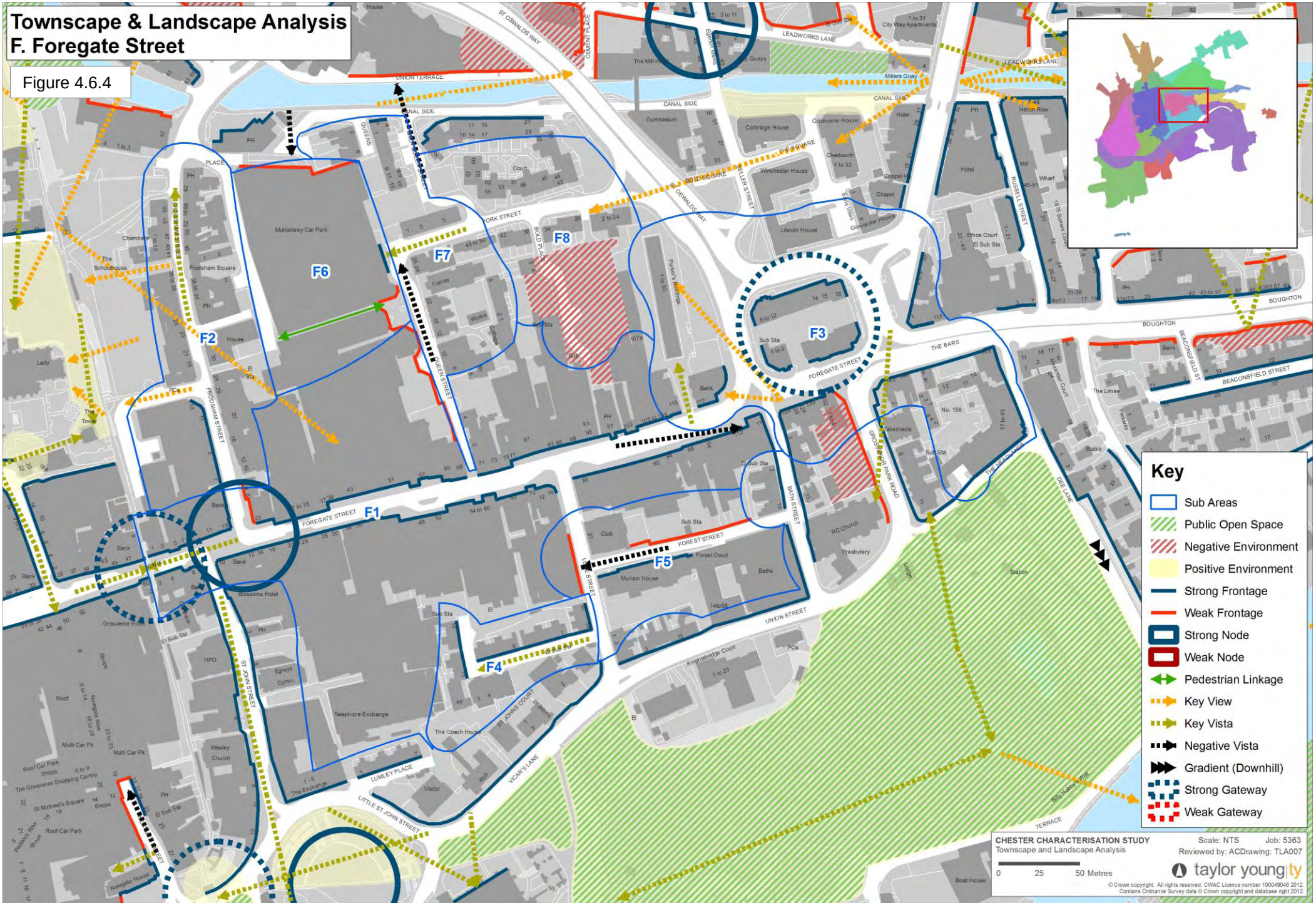
The area's relationship with the canal which runs along its northern edge is important. At present it is somewhat of a hidden treasure, being largely out of sight from most vantage points.

Pedestrianisation along Foregate Street

One of the few street trees on Foregate Street

Townscape & Landscape Analysis
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.4



Designated Heritage Assets

The area falls entirely within the City Centre Conservation Area and contains a large number of listed buildings, dispersed throughout the character area.

This character area also contains a row of terraces on Queen Street which are covered by an Article 4 Direction.

Eastgate, **the Clock** and adjoining **City Walls** are Grade I listed and are Scheduled Monuments.

Eastgate Clock

The most significant Grade II listed buildings are:

- **The Old Bank Chambers**, Foregate Street (Grade II, 1895) - a half timbered building with a projected frontage supported by intricately carved piers
- **Lloyds Bank**, 8 Foregate Street (Grade II, 1793 – 1803) – Greek Revival style, yellow ashlar sandstone to front, stone dressed orange-brown brick to St John's Street
- **Former district bank**, 15 Foregate Street (Grade II, 1921)

- **10 -18 Foregate Street** (Grade II, west part 1896, east part 1911)
- **Priory Place** (Grade II, 1898) – small residential enclave of brick cottages
- **115 Foregate Street** (Grade II, 1889) – 3 storey block of 30 cottage flats (The John Douglas Designed Parker's Buildings)

- **117 Foregate Street** (Grade II, 1889) – converted and attached to adjoining offices in 1990
- **Public baths**, Union Street (Grade II, 1898-1901)

- **2 City Road** (Grade II, 1892)

- **17, 19 and 21 Frodsham Street** (Grade II, circa 1900)
- **Former St Werburgh Middle School** (Grade II, 1909)- now offices (Murlain House)
- **Forest House**, corner of Love Street & Forest Street (Grade II, Late 19th century) – originally one of Chester's biggest town houses built for the Trevor Barnstons, now a public house.

Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

A number of un-listed buildings were identified as possessing townscape value, the majority of which are located along Foregate Street, with a second concentration at Queen Street.

- **F1a. 20-28 Foregate Street** – a 3 storey Edwardian style property, now occupied by Marks and Spencer, with stone lintels and pediments, parapet and sash windows with stone surrounds.

- **F1b. 59 Foregate Street (Santander bank)** – a four storey, half timber building in a Vernacular Revival style, with mullions and oriel windows

- **F1c. 1-3 Foregate (Clarks) –** a three storey building in an Edwardian style, with a recessed central bay with frieze above, and windows with mullions and stone surrounds

- **F1d. 5-7 Foregate Street** – a three storey Vernacular Revival style building, timber faced with gable fronts, horizontally proportioned leaded windows with mullions

- **F1e. 27-35 Foregate Street (Marks & Spencer)** – a three storey building with gable fronts and brick and timber on side bays

F1f. 97 Foregate Street 9 (The Old Queen's Head)- a two storey restored building in vernacular style, with projecting central bay on timber piers

F2a. 12-14 Frodsham Street – a 3 storey, Victorian red brick building with decorative brickwork at upper level, arches at ground floor, and recessed mullion windows

F1g. 76 Foregate Street (Brannigans) – art deco style with rounded corner

F2b. 53 Frodsham Street – a 3 storey Vernacular Revival style property with oriel window

- **F6a. Retained façade, Queen Street** – façade of the former Congregational Church (1772)

- **F7a. The Cottage** – a pleasant red brick cottage with slate roof

- **F7b. Queen Street Christian Church –** Gothic Revival style with rounded arch windows and extended piers

- **F7d. 1-8 St Thomas's Pathway** – a pleasant terrace with decorative tiling board and rounded door arches

Key Detractors

At the eastern end of Foregate Street, at the corner with Bath Street, is a three storey Modernist building. The frontage to Foregate is sub-divided to match historic plot widths and its proportions are generally correct (and the building even re-creates a modern arcade and jetty) However, its protruding eastern end presents a blank side wall to the street. Its design also pays no heed to the impressive John Douglas building (Grade II, 1902) on the opposite corner of Bath Street.

The vacant land (formerly a petrol filling station), and rear of adjacent buildings on the junction of Grosvenor Park Road and Foregate Street, extending toward St Werburgh's Church, is at present an eyesore but is also a key opportunity site.

On the northern side of Forest Street, there is no frontage to street, instead the buildings on Foregate Street back onto Forest Street, revealing unsightly rear eleveations, outbuildings and untidy service yards, resulting in a poor street environment.

To the rear of 12-22 Queen Street, there is a small garage occupying a backland site, operating from a corrugated steel shed which sits oddly in front of a pleasant row of terraces (St. Thomas's).

Terminating the view north up Queen Street are the rear servicing gates to the Tesco store beyond which appears the blank rear facade of the former school which faces onto the canal.

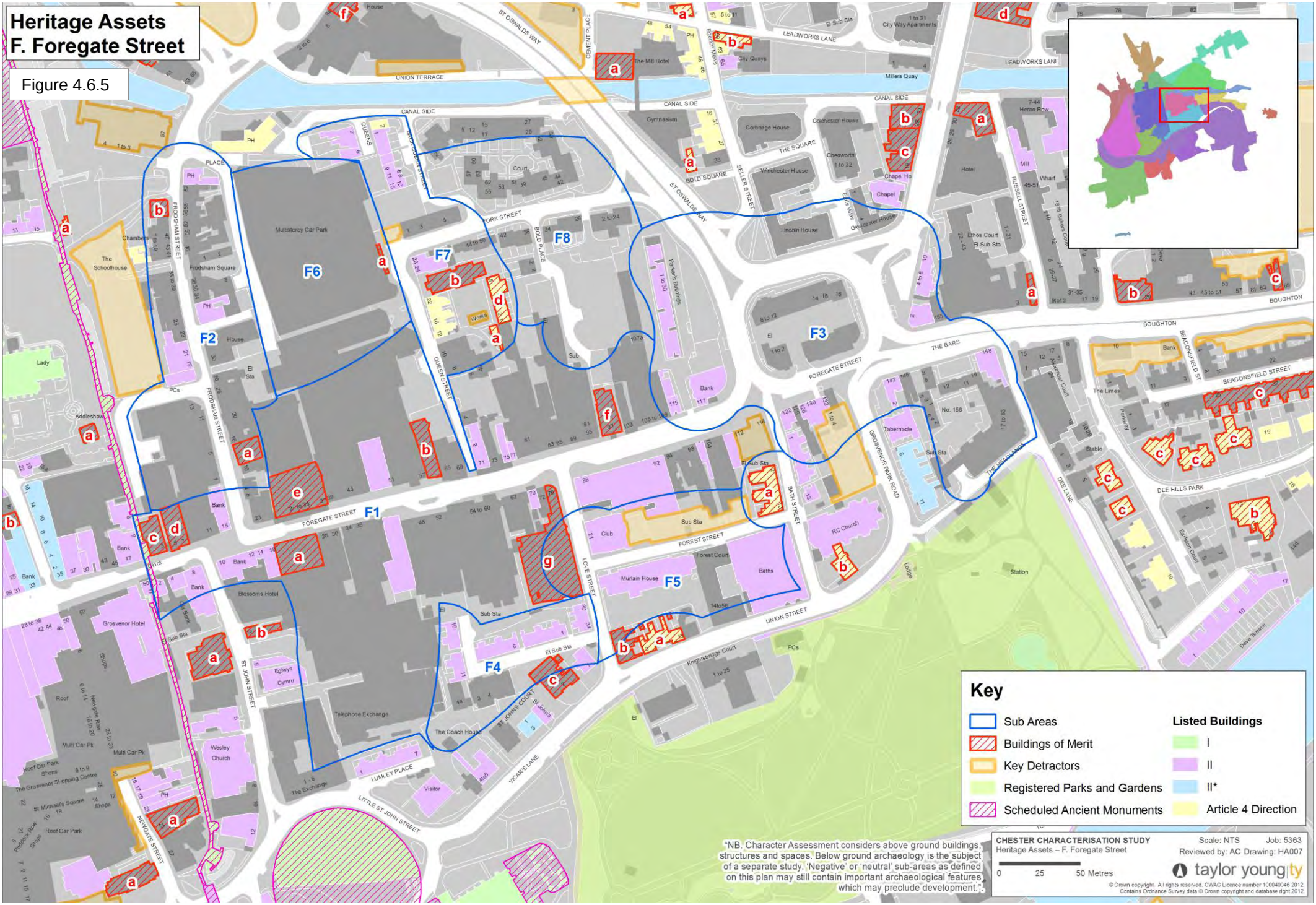
To the rear of York Street, and accessed via Bold Street, there is a public car park which also provides servicing access to properties along Foregate Street. The site presents a negative environment being enclosed by the backs of properties. However, it is mostly out sight from the principal surroundings streets.

Car parking at Bold Place

North side of Forest Street

Heritage Assets
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.5



Summary: Character Assessment

In summary, the overall importance of this character area to Chester's heritage is considered critical and this is reflected in its designation within the Central Conservation Area. Located beyond the City Walls, and extending for some 450 metres along Foregate Street, it is inevitably an area of transition and diversity, both in land-use terms and architectural style and age. There are a number of listed buildings dispersed throughout the area alongside contemporary residential and commercial development. Along Foregate Street and Frodsham Street, the defining character features are the high level of containment and continuity, the strong linear form, and the architectural variety. Elsewhere, the character is more diluted.

Conservation policy appears to be working, but there are examples of inappropriate development which has not respected the historic character of the area. Some buildings show signs of disrepair and in some instances, poor quality shop fronts detract from the architectural detail at upper levels. A number of buildings have been identified, principally along Foregate Street, which do not currently benefit from individual protection but which make a significant contribution to the overall character. Investment in the public realm, particularly soft landscaping, would greatly enhance the area.

The heritage significance of the area has been broken down as follows:

F1. Foregate Street: Critical – an historic route into the central core via Eastgate, with a number of listed, vernacular style buildings.

F2. Frodsham Street: Positive – a secondary shopping street but with strong individual character.

F3. The Barrs: Positive – an area which has suffered considerably with the construction of the ring road, but which still contains a number of important listed buildings, including the John Douglas designed Parker's buildings.

F4. Priory Place: Critical – considered to be the best example of the work of the Chester Cottage Improvement Company.

F5. Forest Street: Positive – home to Chester Public Swimming Baths and the former St Werburgh's Middle School.

F6. Queen Street Car Park: Negative – a contemporary development comprising a Tesco foodstore with car parking above.

F7. Queen Street: Positive – retaining remnants of historic Victorian and Georgian housing, including the enclave of townhouses around Queen's Place and St Thomas's Terrace.

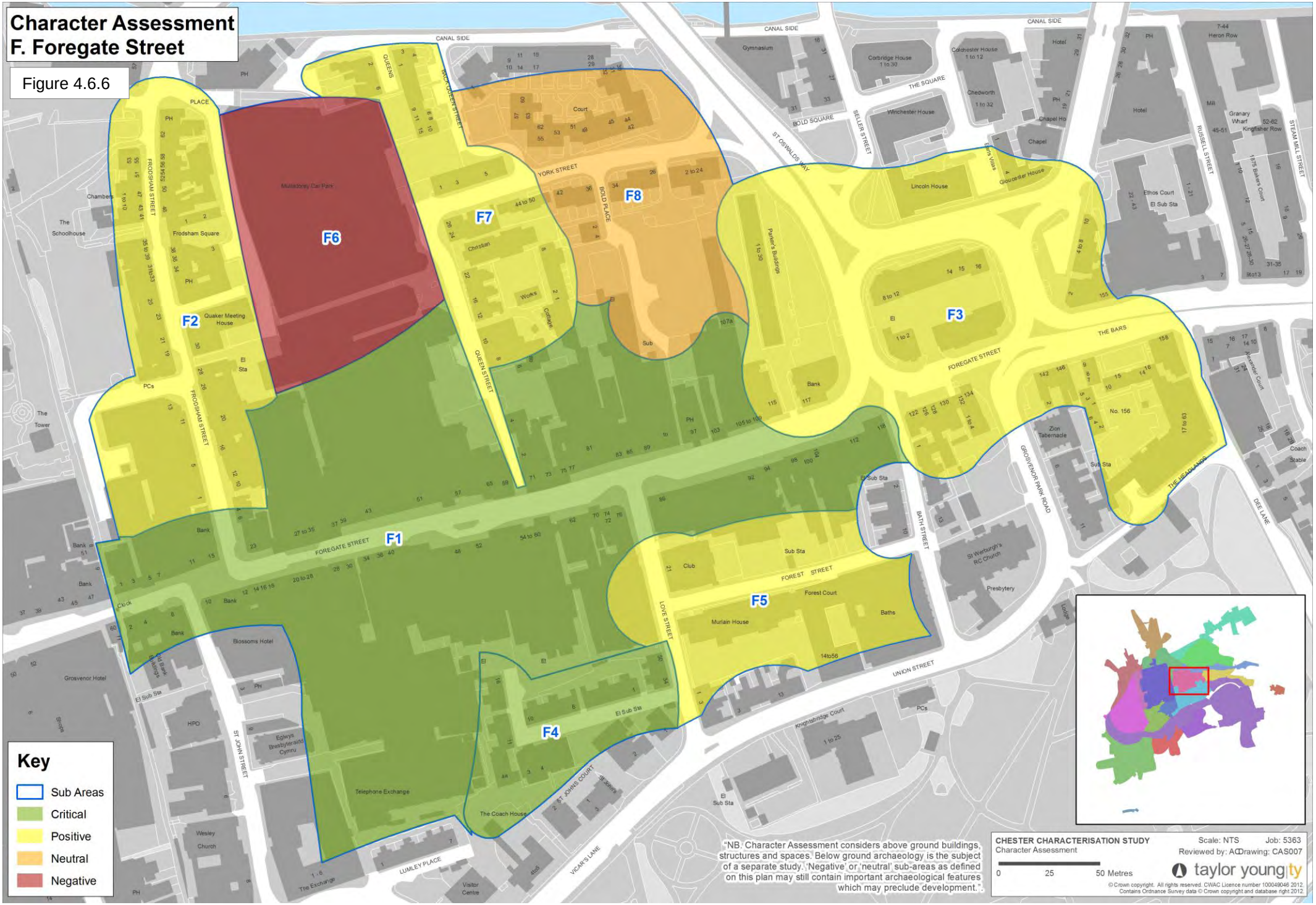
F8. York Street: Neutral – a development of contemporary housing.

Character Statement

"An area characterised by variety in terms of land-use, architectural style and building age. A mixed-use neighbourhood, with retail, housing and office uses arranged around the historic Foregate Street and adjoining streets which are defined by their high level of containment, fine urban grain, consistent building line, linear form and juxtaposition of old with new"

Character Assessment
F. Foregate Street

Figure 4.6.6



"NB. Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development."

CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY
Character Assessment

taylor young|ty

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Management and Policy Recommendations

The mix of land-uses is a defining characteristic of this area. This diversity should be preserved and encouraged further where appropriate. The loss of housing to other uses should be resisted. New housing should be encouraged, particularly where this improves the quality of the street scene or removes a 'bad neighbour' use.

The principal shopping streets of Frodsham Street and Foregate Street are characterised by their small plot widths, fine urban grain and retail variety. The insertion of larger footprint buildings can erode this quality. Where permitted, their impact can be reduced by ensuring that the development is 'wrapped' on either side by smaller plots to encourage diversity of building forms, uses and tenures. Where possible, retailers should be encouraged to extend upwards into vacant or underused upper floors rather than horizontally, by the merging or redevelopment of smaller plots.

It is not considered appropriate to amend the conservation area boundaries in this area. However, a number of buildings have been identified as possessing heritage value and these should be considered for local listing.

Further soft landscaping should be introduced along Foregate Street and Frodsham Street.

Capacity to Accommodate Change

Opportunities for change in this area is likely to be in the form of small infill development, for example along Grosvenor Park Road, Bold Place (redevelopment of the surface car park), and Forest Street but these are difficult, physically constrained sites.

Development pressure is likely to arise from the need for larger retail units along Foregate Street and Frodsham Street to suit the requirements of modern national multiple retailers. Historically the form of the area was dominated by burgage plots and narrow plot frontages are still prevalent. However, the integration of sympathetic modern retail development, such as Marks & Spencers and the former Co-operative store shows that the area can comfortably accommodate such units if design quality is high.

Redevelopment of the Tesco site, should it become available, would provide a crucial opportunity to reconnect Queen Street with the canal and improve the pedestrian link through to Frodsham Street.

Design Principles for New Development

New infill development should adhere to the following general principles:

- Reinforce the historic townscape character. This may be achieved, for example, by promoting gable fronts or colonnades along the principal shopping streets. Shopfronts also need improving.
- Respect for the historic urban grain. Larger footprint buildings should not generally be located on adjacent sites but should be 'wrapped' by smaller units.
- The height of buildings should generally be between two and three stories to reflect the existing scale of development.
- In most cases, development should be set to the back of pavement in order to reinforce the existing urban form.